Education and Culture Committee Inquiry – Educational Attainment Gap – involvement of parents

Summary of Includem’s evidence

Includem argues that young people are ready to learn when they are emotionally stable, with positive relationships in their lives and when they are encouraged and supported to attend school regularly. We believe that the family life of young people is as important to their engagement with education as any factor within school. Building family resilience and developing parental skills are crucial to better outcomes for young people – and for raising attainment.

About Includem

Includem is a charity which helps some of Scotland’s most vulnerable and challenging young people to achieve positive change in their behaviour and relationships and move towards leading fulfilling lives. We are there 24/7 and believe young people are never beyond help. By achieving better results for them, we also reduce public spending in the immediate and long term.

What Includem does

Includem is a specialist provider which works through commissioned arrangements to provide services for vulnerable young people and their families in their own homes and communities. We deliver targeted, personalised services out with school hours with one to one support at evenings and weekends alongside access to a 24 hour support framework.

Our work is focused on our experience that young people are willing to engage with education only when they are emotionally stable and they have positive relationships in their lives. By working in a targeted way not just with the young people but their families we can put in place a structure around school attendance and engagement.

The attainment gap in Scotland will not reduce with more in school interventions alone. To raise attainment resources need to be invested into improving child/parent relationships, child/school relationships and parent/school relationships. Identifying and addressing the underlying causes of why young people do not engage is fundamental.

Our approach is underpinned by the Getting It Right For Every Child principle of making sure that all young people and their families have consistent, coordinated support, when they need it. We have a consistent approach with families focusing on practical and emotional support to help parents establish new school routines, challenge negative behaviours and strengthen relationships.
The key elements of the work with young people and their parents/carers are:

- Practical support to ensure school attendance such as reinforcing bed times, getting up routines etc;
- Proactive work with parents to set boundaries and manage difficult behaviour at home;
- Work with parents to access help for health, housing, finance and other problems which undermine their own parenting capacity and the young person’s family and home life;
- Work with parents on their attitudes to education and responsibilities – giving them the confidence to engage with education;
- Age and stage appropriate support for the child out with school hours which develops and reinforces attendance and engagement as well as confidence, motivation and ability to participate in school work.

An evaluation in 2013\(^1\) found the key outcomes of our work were:

- Improved levels of attendance at school and lower number of exclusions from school due to disruptive behaviours;
- Improved relationships between parents/carers and school;
- Less tension in families as a result of children being at school during the day;
- Less anti-social and risk taking behaviours by young people.

**Parental involvement in education**

We welcome the Committee’s focus on the important role parents and carers play in supporting their children to engage to the fullest of their ability in education.

We would argue however that it is important to make a distinction between those interventions which offer practical support to parents and carers in the home and those policies which are aimed at getting parents involved in the life of the school. For many young people the fundamental barrier to their engagement in education is a lack of stable, supportive family life.

Parents and carers should be much more involved in the education process but involvement alone will not tackle the root causes of why young people do not engage – that requires targeted support to change behaviours and improve relationships.

For further information please contact Michael Shanks, Communications and Policy Manager on 0141 427 0523 or michael.shanks@includem.co.uk.

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\(^1\) [http://www.includem.org/content/publications/Working-With-Families-Review-.pdf](http://www.includem.org/content/publications/Working-With-Families-Review-.pdf)